TURKEY'S ERRATIC FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 2011-2017

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Abstract

In a neorealist approach to the subject, this paper argues that decreases within the harmony of structural, institutional and individual levels within the state (in our case, Turkey), will eventually lead to a less and less successful foreign policy. The article explores Turkey's dyadic foreign relations primarily with Syria before and after the Arab spring, concentrating on the period of 2011 to 2017 (for comparative reasons, we have included Turkey-USA, Turkey-Saudi Arabia and Turkey-Iran relations within the research as well). It shows the slow degradation and increased lack of success within Turkey's foreign policy during the ongoing decade.

Key words: *Turkey, foreign policy, Syria, Iraq, neorealism*

INTRODUCTION

In his 1993 paper, Cristopher Layne rightly predicted, using his neorealist analysis, that American primacy was bound to decline between the years of 2000-2010 [Layne 1993]. Similarly, Vasconcelo, in his 2009 study, claimed that the post-Cold War world had turned multipolar since the USA lost its ability to respond to global issues [Vasconcelos, 2009]. In such an environment, the expectations were that states would want to take greater regional roles. This was indeed valid for Turkey as well, whose recent foreign policy failures have yet to come to the academic spotlight. Starting in 2002, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came to power in Turkey's broken political spectrum, where it stayed until the point of the writing of

this article. It distinguished itself (at least initially) with its moderate Islamic coloring, Western leaning, and an orientation towards liberal market economy [Kösebalaban 2011]. Whether it was attempting to reconcile Islam with democracy (via greater religious liberalization which corresponded to public demand), improve its relations with the EU (European Union, the 2005 opening of the accession negotiations), bring its domestic laws in accordance with the *acquis communitaire* (implementing various constitutional amendment packages), have a greater regional role through its participation in regional and global diplomatic/economic councils (GCC, the Gulf Cooperation Council, a theoretical Middle Eastern Union, etc.), or to play a stronger role in the reconciliation between Iran and the West, or perhaps to increase its economic/trade relations particularly with Arab states, Turkey had it all.

Hence, since 2007, the JDP took a stronger interest in foreign policy as well. The origins of the doctrine which would guide Turkey in its foreign policy for years to come can be observed at this point. Its chief architect, at the time advisor to prime minister, soon to become foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu proclaimed his vision for Turkey in his 2007 paper. Due to its geographical and ideological proximity to the former territories of the Ottoman Empire, Davutoglu envisioned Turkey as a "central country" and regional actor who needs to bring more involvement and stability in regional politics of the Middle East, the Balkans, and Africa [Davutoğlu, 2008]. In other words, Turkey needed to act more in accordance with new regional and global realities, which were assured by the coming of multipolarity, while still obeying liberal, democratic principles, which were one of the main colorings of the party. We hold that pre-JDP Turkey obeyed a strictly reactive policy in its external dealings with other states. Reacting to immediate security concerns, such as the case of the Euphrates dam controversy, or the diplomatic crisis with Syria over Abdullah Ocalan's extradition, can be given as some of the more pertinent examples of such a stance.[1] This might have been either the product of a strong military which obeyed Kemalist secular principles ("peace at home, peace in the world"), or the weak coalitional governments/majority governments which did not have too much potential for staying in power. Thus, with the coming of the JDP, Turkey decidedly abandoned its reactive foreign policy in favor of a more involved and dynamic one.

This is an origin point of problems in Turkish foreign policy, especially in its relation with the Middle East, which only fully manifested themselves in the Syrian case. Question arose whether the countries within Turkey's geopolitical reach would be receptive to this novel foreign policy. Acting at first as a stabilizing central power in the region implied a promotion of Turkey's newly discovered values, such as conservatism, democracy and liberal market economy, which JDP was certainly championing at the time, particularly in the pre-2011 context. It is obvious how appearance of one such proactive and later unilateral player, who adapted and preached Western ideas coupled with concepts such as historical heritage and irredentist-sounding notions of spheres of influence, could have been viewed with a dose of suspicion by countries within its geopolitical neighborhood. Clashes eventually arose not only with Syria, but also indirectly with the Gulf countries as well, including direct clashes with Russia, who all perceived Turkey as trying to achieve regional leadership using its material and ideational capabilities. Turkey

[1] For further reading check Kosebalaban's *Turkish Foreign Policy* chapter 6, and Olson's article *Turkey-Syria Relations since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water.*

soon realized that due to an unstable Middle Eastern environment, the "zero problems with neighbors" policy was untenable, especially in the post-Arab Spring period which caused problems not only in the region, but also with Turkey's biggest sponsor at the time, the USA [Barkley 2011]. One can argue that the proactive role soon turned into a unilateral one, which presupposed not only shifting alliances and tighter international maneuvering, but also strong domestic changes and political reorientations, which started compromising democracy and Turkish Western-leaning itself. Therefore, the question we are posing is why Turkish foreign and domestic policy turned out to be so erratic in the context of the Arab Spring with particular reference to the Syrian case, between the years of 2011 and 2017. The Arab Spring, as a transformative event, offered challenges and opportunities for Turkey, which aimed to increase its relative position. Hence, we believe that this period is especially pertinent for the analysis of Turkish foreign policy since it best exposes its faulty nature that subsequently lead to greater domestic and regional securitization. As a consequence, this further lead to other events such as Turkey's strategic cooperation with Russia over Syria, and Turkey's discord with the US over the issue of the Syrian Kurds.

We utilize neoclassical realist theory in this paper, combined with structural realism, which "argues that the system constrains but does not determine state action and where foreign policy departs from what would be ideal behavior given a state's structural position, domestic politics and ideas are generally the cause" [Rathbun 2008]. Hence we will be concerned with structural, as well as unit-level factors, when trying to answer the above-posed question. Our contention is that Turkey erroneously interpreted structural constraints and mired itself primarily into Syria (and later Iraq as well), which was not conducive to its *raison d'état.* We also hold that this specious foreign policy and misreading of structural constraints comes from domestic, or unit-level variables, coupled with charisma and personalities of statesmen at the individual level of analysis. Hence, our independent variable shall be the degree of harmony between structure, unit, and individual levels. Our dependent variable, which is foreign policy, can take on two values – either success or failure. When we see harmony between the dimensions of an independent variable, we can expect the success of foreign policy. On the other hand, if the harmony is lacking and discord is present between the levels of the independent variable, we can expect failure as a value in our dependent variable.

In the following section we will show how Turkish foreign policy – analyzed over its three dimensions (security, diplomacy, and economy) – took a hit with Turkey's unilateralism and involvement in Syria. To that end, it is important to contrast levels of those dimensions in a pre-and post-2011 timeframe.

1. PROBLEMS OF INVOLVEMENT/ SCOPE OF OBSERVATION

Our main hypothesis is that the decrease in the harmony between structural, state, and individual levels will cause a decrease in the success rate of a foreign policy of a country. We would thus like to empirically demonstrate that Turkish foreign policy post-Arab Spring received the value of failure, where we observe that harmony within the value of the independent variable was lacking. We do this through the analysis of three dimensions of foreign policy: security, economy, diplomacy. In order to know their relative decrease, we will compare the values of indicators with their pre-2011 period levels during which we argue that Turkey possessed greater

harmony between structure, unit, and individual levels, and thus a more successful foreign policy.

1.1 Value of Indicators of Turkish Foreign Policy before the 2011 Syrian Involvement

While Turkey was operating multilaterally (in accordance with NATO and other international organization), its acceptance rate in the Middle East was stellar. Turkey was finally exiting its decades long geopolitical shell, and Arabs accepted this development with wide open arms; Turkey's support for the early Arab Spring democratic movements against dictators such as Gaddafi or Mubarak certainly contributed to this image [Walker 2011]; Turkey was additionally considered as a model by some states (such as Egypt or Tunisia) for successfully combining Islam and democracy. Furthermore, Turkey-Russia relations were at their highest after 2008. The year of 2009 saw highest-level diplomatic visits, which were supposed to solve regional differences and conflicts through multilateral involvement of both countries. In 2010, the two countries decided to remove mutual visa requirements. 2010 was also the year when an agreement was signed for the construction of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant in Turkey, which was to be performed and owned by the subsidiary of the Russian state-run company, Rosatom. Thus, an increase in economic cooperation between the two countries was taking an upward trajectory. The roots of these undertakings and the general rapprochement between Turkey and Russia can even be traced back to 2005 and the construction of the Blue Stream pipeline, which came as a crowning achievement of post-Soviet Russian-Turkey cordial relations.

The relations with Iran (pre-2011) were very affable as well. The policies of what Pınar Bilgin called "civilizational geopolitics" were based on mutual acceptance, a promotion of economic relationships, and policy interdependence based on shared cultural ties [Bilgin 2004]. Interference in the internal nature of the political systems was therefore out of the question. Hence, we see Turkey engaging in finding a multilateral solution for the Iranian nuclear program, where in 2010 it offered to outsource enriched Uranium so that Iran could avoid sanctions [Al Jazeera, 2000]. Trade relations were also increasing; for example, Turkish trade with Iran increased from 1 billion in 2000 to 4 billion in 2005 [Schleifer 2006]. At the time, Iranian gas export has seen an upward trajectory along with Turkish investments into Persian gas fields [Iran Daily 2008]. Cooperation within the field of security was blossoming as well; one instance of this can be seen in the Turkey-Iran deal, where the two countries agreed in 2011 to multilaterally tackle issue of Kurdish terrorists and militants in Northern Iraq [TR Defence, 2011].

The third dyadic relationship we wish to consider is that between Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Pre-Arab Spring Turkey and Saudis shared many ties, including those of common geopolitical environment, religion, and culture. Furthermore, King Abdullah had great interest in maintaining good relations with Turkey, seeing it as a rising Sunni power, even though Turkey is an officially secular state, with religion playing a secondary role. This was clearly seen from high-level reciprocal diplomatic visits; in 2006, King Abdullah visited Turkey, first time in four decades, while in 2009, the then Turkish president Gül reciprocated and visited Riyadh. These meetings had their roots in well-established cooperation between Turkey and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Since 2005, Turkey and the Saudi-dominated GCC were coming very close together; in 2005 they agreed on a framework for a future

free trade agreement, and in 2008, the new Memorandum of Understanding was signed between these countries. Therefore it is not entirely outlandish that some have seen cooperation between Turks and Arabs as a way of providing greater regional and international cooperation in various issue areas, from economic to security ones [Aras 2005]. Economic relations were progressing as well; for example, their mutual trade in 2010 amounted to 4.65 billion dollars, and it kept increasing until 2012. One other example instance of good economic cooperation was the 2007 treaty which had a goal of avoiding double taxation [Al Qassemi 2011].

Even though it is a domestic issue, we believe it is important to mention Turkey's Kurdish issue and how it reflected on the relations with other regional actors. Kurds are stateless people inhabiting geographies of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran respectively, which imposes a great weight on the aforementioned countries' bilateral relations. Turkey's Kurdish problem was arguably best embodied in the Kurdistan Worker Party (PKK), a militant Marxist organization that has been leading an on and off war with the Turkish state since 1984 [Hakyemez 2017]. With the capture of the PKK leader Ocalan in 1999, the Turkish state hoped that this would put an end to Kurdish terrorism. However, this was not the case. Despite the fact that the PKK resumed with the guerilla warfare in 2004, Erdogan's government recognized the futility of a military solution and embarked on a peace process by other means [Hakyemez 2017]. This incentive lasted until 2015, when Turkey announced a domestic offensive against the PKK. During the time that the peace initiative lasted, Turkey markedly softened its policy towards both Syria and Iran, which some scholars contribute to domestic politics of de-securitization [Aras and Polat 2008]. Despite being on the brink of war in 1998, Turkey and Syria turned over a new leaf with the coming of the JDP to power, and even cooperated in solving long-standing issues pertaining to the Kurds, including water management; the early JDP era marked an end of the Syrian utilization of Kurds as a trump card against Turkey [Altunışık and Tür 2006]. Structural factors such as the American invasion of Iraq or domestic idiosyncrasies like Erdogan's and Assad's personalities, compounded with their respective Kurdish issues contributed to this rapprochement. The early JDP's de-securitization also contributed in ameliorating their issues with Iran pertaining to the Kurds. At that time, Turkey stopped "otherizing" Iran. Instead of seeing Iran as existential "other" that threatened it with Islamic revolutionary fervor and support for Kurdish terrorism, Turkey saw Iran as a potential ally, not only in economic and political realms as stated above, but also in security considerations against the PKK, drug and human trafficking, etc [Aras and Polat 2008]. All in all, this period marked a shift from the Kurdish issue being utilized by Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey against each other, to a closer multilateral cooperation in solving it.

1.2 Value of Indicators of Turkish Foreign Policy after the 2011 Syrian Involvement

After the 2011 Syrian case, we have seen a decline in the value of indicators across all of the aforementioned spheres. For instance, Turkey immediately came into conflict with Iran. Özüm Uzun claims that Turkey-Iran relations were blossoming prior to the Arab Spring, yet after it, they have returned to those of competition and rivalry, due to their very different perceptions of the events at hand [Uzun 2013]. Turkey believed that the events, which followed in the wake of Arab Spring, were an

honest attempt at democratization removed from foreign backing, while Iran was more apprehensive, and believed they were the product of Western imperialism and Israeli quest for supremacy. The same author claimed that Turkey followed revisionist policies in Syria, while Iran approached it in a balanced fashion, trying to retain the status quo [Uzun 2013]. This is a reasonable statement to make considering Turkey's policy of involvement in the region in favor of pushing pro-democracy movements to power in order to create regimes similar to its own. As the only democratic power, Turkey considered democracy promotion as its main legitimizing tool against Iranian sectarianism and Saudi Wahhabism. After 2016, Turkey's invasion of Northern Syria directed against the Kurdish political entities can be taken as another example of this revisionism. It is important to note that Iran and Syria, as close allies, tend to support each other often. With Turkey taking a more unilateral role, it also appropriated normative-based injunctions, particularly in its relations with Iran over the questions of democracy and the perennial Sunni-Shia struggle [Öniş 2012]. After that episode, we also see the Turkish willingness to install an early warning radar system, as well as an Iranian reluctance to accept Turkish presence in nuclear talks [Öniş, 2012].

We can notice a similar development in Turkish relations with Russia. In the decades preceding the Arab Spring, not unlike with Iran, Turkish relations have been pretty sincere with Russia. Furthermore, Turkish foreign policy was orchestrated in such a way that it did not concern itself much with regional dynamics, which Russia welcomed as a positive instance; a trend which lasted until the Arab Spring when Russian policy towards Turkey completely reversed just like Iran's [Ayşe 2012]. The lowest point of the Turkish-Russian relations came with the downing of the Russian jet over Turkish airspace in 2015. Arguably, since then, Turkey revised its policy towards Syria, and we should see improvement in Turkish-Russian relations, but nevertheless, the early years of the Syrian conflict were mired in diplomatic and economic scandals.

The case of Turkey's relations with USA is the very opposite to the case of its dealings with Iran and Russia. At the outset of the Syrian conflict, the USA and Turkey saw eye to eye, and were cooperating in bringing about democracy and transition in the country on the Turkish border [Tanır 2011]. Nevertheless, in the recent years, America found it increasingly hard to turn a blind eye to Turkey's wavering trends in democratization, its abysmal relations with European Union and further unilateral involvement in Syria [Tuygan and Kirişci 2016].

So far, we were demonstrating how through these developments, Turkey got isolated at one or another point in time (either at beginning or later stages of Syrian conflict) in all of its dyadic relationships. We noticed the decline of cooperation with every regional power, including with the USA on a more global level. Not only has this shown through an appalling diplomacy at the level of various international diplomatic events, but it also manifested itself seriously on Turkish economy through decreasing trade volume with the aforementioned countries. We can see how the Turkey-Iran trade volume has been progressively decreasing between the years of 2012-2016; in 2012 it was 21.89 billion dollars, in 2013 14.57, in 2014 13.71, in 2015 9.77 and finally in 2016 it hit its lowest point of 9.65 billion US dollars [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016a]. Turkey's economic relations throughout the Arab Spring period with Saudi Arabia strongly resemble those of Turkey's relations with Iran. The Turkey-SA trade volume was at its highest in 2012 at 8.0 billion USD, then it gradually decreased, hitting its lowest point in 2016, with 1.4

billion USD [Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016b]. The economic image of Turkey's dealings with the USA was a tad different. During the early years of the Syrian conflict, until 2014, the USA's export and imports were significantly higher than those of the recent years. In 2014/2015, Turkey took a more direct military role in Syria, which was at odds with the USA's interests, and that manifested itself in the economic sphere. In 2012 and 2013, the USA's exports to Turkey were standing at 12.474,7 million USD and 12.078,7 million USD respectively. These numbers significantly decreased since 2014; by 2017, exports were standing at 6.995 [Maryland 2017]. The USA's imports of Turkish products stayed relatively consistent throughout these years, with relatively small fluctuations, probably due to decreasing purchasing power of the Turkish lira, compared to American dollar.
Another reason why Turkish increased involvement in Middle East (post-Arab Spring) might not have been conducive to its national interests and security is terrorism. After 2011, the level and frequency of terrorist attacks skyrocketed in Turkey. Between 2011 and 2017 Turkey was targeted 87 times by 9 different terror groups and number of deaths reached 956 while number of wounded was 4717 [140 Journos, 2017]. In a longitudinal research conducted by Karamanoğlu, which focused on terrorist activities in Turkey from 2001 to 2012, we can see that the attacks reached their peak in 2012 [Karamanoglu 2016]. After 2012, terrorist activities continued, but with lesser intensity, until Turkey decided to engage in military involvement in Syria. We see their increase yet again in 2015 and 2016 due to Turkey's "weapon rattling" and eventual invasion [Keng Kuek Ser 2016]. Therefore, these can be seen as a response to Turkey's greater regional interventionism and geopolitical fluctuations, instability of borders, influx of refugees, ISIS, and Kurdish dissatisfaction with Turkish regional policies. To illustrate this point properly, we believe it is pertinent to note how the 2016 Istanbul airport attack occurred shortly after Erdogan proclaimed his wish for reconciliation with Russia and Israel, and hence after an official apology letter has been issued to Russia over its downed jet [Simon 2016]. This itself came in the light of the Turkish invasion of Syria. Furthermore, since the invasion, the number of Turkish military deaths in Syria has reached 34.

2. STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

In this section, we plan to show theoretically and empirically how conditions were not inviting for Turkey to act unilaterally in the region; in fact, Turkey opted to sideline present structural constraints. To this end, we shall employ a neorealist epistemology. It is a well-known and generally-admitted fact in realist lore that states operate in the condition of anarchy, which in turn creates the principle of self-help, stemming from the material distribution of capabilities. In such an international system, every state will be wary of the intentions of other states and therefore, according to Waltz, its predominant interest will be in surviving, and hence maximizing security [Waltz 1979]. In a similar vein, Snyder warns how a number of states have brought themselves to ruin, risking even their survival, due to the misreading of structural constraints and an irrational wish for expansion. Snyder goes even further than this, and traces causes of such self-damaging over-expansionist behavior to three variables: offensive realist, cognitive and domestic [Snyder 2013]. Another scholar, Van Evera, by developing his offense-defense theory gives insights on *when* a war, or in this case unilateralism, will be more

likely to happen. He relegates the "cult of the offense" to dimensions which Snyder would certainly recognize as cognitive and domestic variables [Van Evera, 1984]. In his other work, Van Evera and Roussel show how states will be more likely to engage in offensive behavior if they believe that conquest will be easy or indeed if their military capabilities would have the advantage [Roussel and Van Evera 2001]. We believe it is important to mention Walt as well, who arguably introduced a dose of constructivism into neorealist thinking. For Walt, state perceptions regarding their security and therefore alliance behavior will be influenced not only by relative material capabilities, but also by other factors, which largely depend on perception, such as proximity, offensive capabilities and offensive intentions of other states [Walt 1985]. Randall Schweller attempted to rectify Walt's logic by pointing out security bias in his thinking; he therefore brought back the concept of revisionist state which has even greater propensity for bandwagoning than Walt gave it credit [Schweller 1994]. Rowe also showed how tighter alliance formation and offensive/preemptive behavior does not result only from the perception of relative capabilities of other states but also on states' perceptions of its own capacities [Rowe, 2005]. From this we see how alliances and balancing are crucial for realist material-based thinking.

As we mentioned earlier, pre-2011 Turkey was practicing policy of civilizational geopolitics which was mainly revolving around mutual recognition and "low-level" politics [Bilgin, 2004]. Part of such conceptualization of foreign policy revolved around presenting Turkey as a soft power who had great amount of ideational capacity and willingness to utilize it rather than a more coercive, material one [Economic Review, 2013]. The elements of this soft power approach can be found in Turkey's own democratic consolidation, which made it more attractive in the eyes of third parties as a potential partner for political and economic reforms; moreover, its proactive foreign policy enabled Turkey to play a role of a mediator in regional conflicts [Altunışık 2008]. Furthermore, Turkey showed interest on reconciling various issues in the region such as long-standing water problem with Syria, opening programs in favor of visa liberalization with Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, reconciling Syria and Israel and helping to re-integrate isolated Syria and Iran into the world politics [Omait, 2014]. During 2000s, previous points of contention with Syria in particular have been converted into opportunities through the neo-Ottoman identity policy and zero problems with neighbors catchphrase; desecuritization, security cooperation, multilateral water management, deepening trade relations all took place [Hinnebusch 2015]. What was also characteristic was number of mutual high-level state visits and courteous rhetoric between statesmen of both countries; while in 2009 Davutoglu met with Syrian foreign minister al-Moualem and smiled for the cameras not even 10 years prior both countries were at the state of combat readiness [Zalewski, 2011]. Erdogan was even known for referring to Syrians as "his brothers" while Assad called Turkey Syria's "best friend" [Chris Phillips 2009]. But as Copeland succinctly showed in his critique of Wendt's constructivism, the nature of international anarchy is such that regardless of current intersubjective practices of states, which certainly can be of integrative and cooperative nature, states cannot help but be preoccupied with uncertainty regarding future developments; the question is not whether current distribution of interests favors revisionism but rather that future system will contain revisionist states. This critique points out ever-present implications of domestic-level pathologies into an international rationale which realists can never completely dispense with [Copeland 2000].

When it became clear that Turkey cannot influence Assad to abandon his position and open way for democratization of the country, a realist reasoning came into the picture. Despite their previous good relations, Turkey immediately started creating and sponsoring anti-government militant groups which later came to be known as the Free Syrian Army [O'Bagy 2013]. Hence, Turkey attempted to indirectly influence the course and outcome of the Syrian war. This can be seen as a clear move from attempts to shape region multilaterally to a more unilateral fashion. Despite mutual understanding between Erdogan and Assad on a multitude of issues, Turkey wanted to empower elements of the Syrian society which would, should they come into power, enable them direct influence over the Syrian government. Seen through a realist lens, one can certainly notice how this would be beneficial for Turkey. Not only would the issue of water and the manipulation of Euphrates river become a non-issue, it would also allow Turkey to influence how future Syrian governments dealt with the Kurds in the Northern regions of the country. In line with this, at least certain sections of Turkish society, such as Kemalists who mostly inhabited bureaucracy and military structure of Turkish state, argued for Turkey to take a hardline in its dealing with Syrian Kurds, due to fears of Syria granting them bigger rights and autonomy under the auspice of liberal West and USA in particular [Taşpınar 2012].

Furthermore, the claim can be made that if new government came to power with the involvement of Turkey, there existed a possibility that the century-long issue over Hatay province would be solved favorably for Turkey once and for all. The neo-Ottoman current of Turkish foreign policy orientations, to which Ahmet Davutoglu belonged, argued that Turkey should take on a more involved regional role, which would help it influence regional realities through a soft power focus on diplomacy, economy, and culture [Taşpınar 2012]. But we see how this thinking was a sham, and was consequently abandoned when the first opportunity presented itself for a military solution. Indeed, we can notice how Turkey acted in the Syrian case more in line with precepts which would deem it to be revisionist rather than a status quo state. An attempt to unilaterally change Syrian realities by direct or indirect involvement was bound to create a balancing behavior by other actors in the region. We use the word “actors” on purpose, as the act of balancing was not conducted solely by states themselves, but also by sub-state groups aligning themselves with the mentioned states. A pertinent example of this can be seen in the Syrian Kurds’ vying for the USA’s support [Gunter, 2015]. In the early years of the Syrian war, namely, prior to 2015, we see coalitions forming between Syria, Iran and Russia to counter Western attempts (from which Turkey was seen as a part) of changing geopolitics of the Middle East [Thongin 2017]. Thus, if we follow Schweller’s balance of interests categorization, then Russia, Iran and Syria were seen as status quo states, not Turkey.

Nevertheless, while Schweller does mention that states who are revisionist might bandwagon with the most powerful revisionist state we do not see such behavior here. This implies that Turkey was not seen as powerful actor who could pull off something like this in the first place; furthermore, due to the fact that Turkey was torn between its unilateral objectives and loyalties to the West, it was not likely that Turkey, even if successful, would manage to accommodate interests of other actors who had a stake in the Syrian war. Instead, the type of behavior we notice is more in line with a traditional understanding of alliances as proposed first by Waltz and Walt. States on the opposite spectrum of interests relative to Turkey decided to

balance against it, rather than jump on the bandwagon, or simply let it slide. By understanding this, one can see why Turkey's half-hearted attempts to find a multilateral solution in 2012 through involvement of Russia, Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia provided no results.

This indirect balancing behavior was certainly apparent in the case of Saudi Arabia and Saudi-led coalition that included most of the Gulf states as well. It is important to note that certain Gulf countries like Qatar did not agree with the Saudi regional hegemony, thereby carving their own independent foreign policies, especially in relation to the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran and Turkey. This led to a plethora of problems with Saudi Arabia, ultimately culminating in Qatar's regional isolation and the blockade imposed on it that is still ongoing [Al Jazeera, 2018].

Due to their long-standing animosities with Iran, it was obvious that the Saudis could not join that camp, but it also became apparent, as time progressed, that they would not take Turkish revisionist meddling idly either. Due to the constraints of necessity, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were willing to cooperate on certain issues at the very outset of Syrian conflict, primarily to counter pro-Assad forces. But their differences were also obviously manifesting. What guided the Saudi rationale in Syria was the threat of Iran gaining greater geopolitical influence, something which was not present in initial Turkish calculations. The second issue of significant importance for Saudis was to balance out against the Muslim Brotherhood and other factions, most of which were backed by Turkey, which they perceived as a threat to their regime [Quilliam 2017]. This ensured hitches in workings of multilateral organizations which were dependent on the support of Saudi Arabia and Turkey among other countries; the National Coalition for the Syrian Revolutionary and the Opposition Forces and Friends of Syria being some of them.

Similarly, with the USA, Turkey witnessed a downturn in relations. This might be due to two reasons. Domestic changes and the weakening of democracy in Turkey can be seen as an ideological factor which contributed to this downturn not only in relationship with the USA, but also with the European Union. Stephen Walt certainly took ideological proximity into account when analyzing security behavior [Walt 1985]. The fact that Turkey deviated from the democratic norm might explain the shifting alliance behavior between Turkey and the USA. The second factor which might have contributed to this is the row over the Syrian Kurds. While Turkey wanted to weaken Kurdish presence in Northern Syria, the USA saw Syrian Kurds as its main trump card against ISIS and other radical jihadist elements, some of which Turkey supported; to this end, the US rhetoric against PYD/PKK, which were deemed as terrorist organizations, was weakened, while support consequentially increased [Gunter 2015]. The case of the US support to Kurds in Erbil and Kobane is especially telling. One instance of this is Turkey forbidding any help from entering into Kobane, in terms of either weapons or fighters, from its side of the border, as the US-led coalition attacks ensured a Kurdish victory over the Islamic State. Turkish inability to cooperate or reach any sort of accord with the USA and Europe over the Syrian Kurds further contributed to its diplomatic and military isolation propelling further unilateral behavior. Thus, although Turkey was initially seen as a revisionist power by Russia and Iran, the United States of America ultimately started regarding Turkey in a very similar fashion as well. As we can see, not only did Turkish selective support for certain groups which were not internationally-backed cause this, but the Turkish-American dispute over Kurds as well. Isolated by the Western camp, Turkey had no choice but to ultimately

bandwagon with Russia in favor of tackling the Kurdish threat in Northern Syria that was affiliated to its own Kurdish terrorist movement. Although Turkey's bandwagoning with Russia falls outside the scope of this paper, it is important to mention that Turkey's military operations in Syria sanctioned by Russia leave Turkey outside of the bounds of NATO, which puts it in a very precarious security position.

Turkey overestimated its capacities on multiple counts in Syria. First of all, Turkey overestimated the unity of the Syrian opposition; while backing certain parts, it was inevitable to isolate others, such as secular Sunnis, Christians, and Syrian Kurds [Christopher Phillips 2012]. Turkey had also estranged other state-actors like Saudi Arabia and USA due to its selective backing of certain groups and undermining others which did not sit well with wider policy programs of aforementioned states. Secondly, it underestimated Assad's power and wish to maintain the government; while Turkey predicted that Assad is going to go down as fast as other Arab dictators which were swept away by Arab Spring this did not happen [Christopher Phillips 2012]. Question one needs to pose is whether due to this miscalculation Turkey also underestimated amount of capabilities both diplomatic and military/economic necessary for the overthrow to happen? Empirical evidence indicates that when these calculations were not met Turkey was not willing to overreach any further. Great commitment of Russia to status quo in Syria complicates the situation even more; again something which Turkey probably was not expecting guided by the hope of swift victory by the opposition [Demir, 2017]. In light of this I can conclude that due to the misreading of structural and material constraints Turkey received a bad end of the bargain in Syrian case. When Turkish statesmen realized that Assad is there to stay and that further isolation due to its unilateralism is untenable, Turkey switched sides in 2016 and turned to multilateral solution in an earnest manner. But this switch did not come out of the blue, it came from structural prerogatives.

3. UNIT AND INDIVIDUAL LEVEL MISCALCULATIONS

According to Rathbun, neoclassical realism is at the same time prescriptive and proscriptive theory of international relations [Rathbun 2008]. This means that when structural constraints are not obeyed state will necessarily be punished. I have shown this in previous sections. But neoclassical realists often argue that reason for this misreading of structure stems from unit (state) and individual levels of analysis. Therefore, in order to further elucidate why Turkey acted against structural constraints I will explore these two levels of my independent variable. My contention is that degree of harmonization between structural, unit, and level factors decides on the quality of foreign policy; if the discord is obvious between them then we can witness failure in the foreign policy which is exactly what happened here.

Now, it is important to understand that the modern Republic of Turkey was created by war through the revolutionary struggle of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Therefore, since the formation of Turkey in 1923, military played a great role in Turkish social and political life as carriers of Kemalist legacy. The role of military can be best seen through its direct involvement in Turkish politics in the case of four successful coups [Kadercan and Kadercan, 2016]. It can be argued that Turkish military and Kemalist intelligentsia further contributed to the divide between center and

periphery which has been subject of much theorizing in Turkey [Özbudun 2013; Serif 2005]. Due to such and similar experiences, Turkey became a country with weak institutions and strong personalities which dominated Turkish politics for decades [Selçuk, 2016]. The example of Erdogan falls neatly into this characterization. What differentiated Erdogan and the JDP from previous cases was his successful domestic consolidation of power and reigning in of the military [Yildiz 2012]. Regardless, Kemalist elements (secular) remained a strong part of Turkey's bureaucratic machinery and overall Turkish *Weltanschauung* [Gjorshoski 2017]. This is also evident in political life as well, which can be inferred from the principles of the current second-largest political grouping in Turkey: the Republican People's Party. We hold that the Turkish state, due to the nature of its weak institutions, is a perfect example of politics based on interest-based coalitions and politicking.

Having shown some insights into the workings of Turkish state, we can better understand why it opted to go against structural constraints and intervene in Syria. Since the formation of the Turkish Republic, Kemalists had an interest in maintaining the *status quo* while only reacting to international events, rather than having any clear plan of action when it comes to instigating them. The only clear precept they held was maintaining a strong pro-Western course. This changed as periphery came to power, most famously under Turkish former president Turgut Ozal, who had a vested interest in liberalizing and diplomatically opening up the country, showing that the way of the West was not the only way to go. Self-admittedly, the JDP itself carries most of Ozal's understanding when it comes to handing of foreign policy [Laçiner 2003]. When the JDP – as a liberal conservative party – came to power in 2002, it was allowed to exist in a sort of a cohabitation with a Kemalist state structure [Robins 2007]. In the early years of the JDP rule, foreign policy was in accordance with Kemalist secular, pro-Western principles. This was best shown in two cases: the 2004 Turkey's EU accession negotiations and 2003 US war in Iraq [Robins, 2007]. While neither Kemalists nor Islamists/conservatives wanted a military solution to the standoff, by 2003 it became obvious that both of these factions would support the US invasion of Iraq simply because it was a pragmatic thing to do, considering the USA's global position and status at the time. Moreover, in 2002, Erdogan and the JDP surprised everyone when they announced that Turkey was ready to start accession negotiation to the EU. This was especially interesting considering Erdogan's history with political Islam and the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) that considered the EU and the West to be a "Christian club". The JDP was looking to gain European support to further liberalize the country and make the political spectrum more plural, which would ultimately free it from the secular/military constraints and army interventions within civil processes.

With further advents of liberalization, Kemalists started slowly turning away from the European Union in particular, and the West in general, due to two reasons. First, the EU's great demands on liberalization required Turkey to solve its decades-long Kurdish problem by granting Kurds greater rights and liberties; this was something Kemalists, due to their strong republican tradition, were not too keen on doing [Moustakis and Chaudhuri 2005]. Secondly, the EU demanded further liberalization in terms of human rights, which meant allowing greater religious liberties (allowing headscarves in universities, opening up of Imam Hatip schools, etc.) and rights for minorities, which again went against Kemalist republican principles [Mühlenhoff 2014].

The rigidity of the Kemalist ideology caused shifts in its thinking especially pertaining to foreign policy. After all, that was the one of few possible areas of convergence with a socially conservative, yet economically and diplomatically liberal ruling party. Ömer Taşpınar calls this the "third vision of Turkish foreign policy" or the "Turkish variant of Gaullism", which was centered around the emphasis on the country's grandeur and independence [Taşpınar 2012]. From this we can see that interest-based coalition between Kemalists and conservatives was stemming from ideological reasons. Turkey wanted to act according to realist precepts when the Arab Spring started, particularly in the Syrian case, but this "realist" undertaking was bound to fail due to mistaken, idealistic elements upon which it was constructed. Thus it turned into revisionism influenced by domestic factors [Snyder, 2013; Van Evera, 1984]. Namely, the interest-based conflict between the strongest political currents within the country (the Kemalist bureaucracy/intelligentsia/CHP and the conservative JDP) came into being due to their disagreement around ideal notions which ensured that their cooperation and anything that amounted from it in the foreign sphere was *ad hoc* and a complete miscalculation of structural constraints. Points of agreement which were based on Turkish grandeur and independence were itself too utopian, and were strongly reminiscent of Neo-Ottomanist thinking as defined by Davutoglu. This explanation agrees with Snyder's explanation of logrolling, where different interests within country logroll or trade their policy preferences and expansionism, or in this case unilateralism, arises as a misfortunate side-effect on which all interest parties can agree [Van Evera, 1984]. Understood as such, were it not for the coalition, Turkey would probably not take the hard stance against Syrian Kurds, while at the same time, it would not progressively start turning its back on the West and the EU integration process. Snyder goes on to explain that logrolling behavior is less likely to occur in democracies due to the presence of diffuse interests, yet should we understand Turkey as a country with weak institutions and democracy which is not consolidated enough, especially in the liberal sense of the word, the emergence of logrolling should not be all that surprising.

Furthermore, the unilateral, revisionist role of Turkey in Syria can be seen as resulting from the nature of the government itself. Namely, Zakaria argues that states are more willing to take on more unilateral and stronger roles in international relations where durable, centralized government exists [Zakaria 1999]. Turkey in 2011 fits this description. Not only did JDP had majority government, but the centralization of power was strong as well, which can be seen as an outcome of JDP's rule over the country since 2002. Furthermore, greater centralization was ensured by coalitional participation of bureaucracy, military and other elements of Turkish state described above. This might be a reason why Turkey decided to take a unilateral approach after decades of engaging in reactive foreign policy. During most of its existence, Turkey was plagued by weak, coalitional governments due to the military's penchant for removing strong parties and leaders. This was especially felt during 1990s, which Turks refer to as "the lost decade", due to an abysmal economy and inter-party bickering. With the DP re-establishing order alongside a greater participation of Kemalist elements, a proactive foreign policy was to be expected.

Turkey's public support for military intervention in Syria was rather intense. In a poll conducted in 2013, the ORC found out that 71.8% of people supported the military intervention in Syria for the toppling down of Assad. Research claiming that

public support for wars will be greater when there is flagrant violation of human rights has already been conducted [Weeks and Tomz, 2017]. This certainly might be one of the explanations for such intense support for the intervention. Yet rather than obeying public opinion, we believe that Erdogan shaped it in the first place in favor of his narrow and personal political interests. In the early years of the Syrian conflict, Erdogan was adamant in his belief that Turkey was a model of *ummah* (community of believers) that needed to be followed by Muslims worldwide. This gave him domestically moral high ground over Assad, whom he saw as illegitimate, and which he used as an impetus to initiate institutional change in favor of a more politically-centralized presidential system [Nation, 2012]. Furthermore, he often reinforced his speeches by religious rhetoric making it seem as he is has direct "mission from God" [Gursel 2016]. Research has been done on this topic, and claims that "mythical discourse" shapes what public considers to be legitimate have been considered [Esch 2010]. Erdogan's post-2011 utilization of religious discourse can be seen as a supplement to his socially conservative policies. Moreover, religion-imbued rhetoric serves as an additional legitimizing tool in light of the weakening democracy levels in Turkey proper.

This certainly might be one of the explanations for such a high support for the intervention. Erdogan certainly obeyed the public opinion, which can be argued to have been partially shaped by him and the ruling structure in the first place. Be that as it may, the war effort, due to the reasons described above, proved to be insufficient, and Turkey got mired in Syria through its proxies while at the same time getting internationally isolated. Mesquita *et al* argued that democracies should rarely go to wars due to the punishing by the domestic audience; even if they do opt for war, they should make sure to devote all resources necessary to win it for the same reason [De Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson, & Smith, 1999]. Their prescription can certainly apply to Erdogan and the JDP's case. The failure to back his rhetoric with some tangible results almost cost the JDP its majority government in the 2015 general elections, where they won only 41% of votes. Due to the failure to form the government, the elections were repeated, and in the following iteration, the JDP received enough popular confidence to form a majority government. This can be explained as due to the public disdain of coalitional governments which cost Turkey too much during the last decade of the 1990s. Erdogan's expectation for a quick victory proved to be unfounded, and the entire rhetoric against Assad (including an unsuccessful proxy war) almost cost him the elections in 2015. Similarly, Fearon argued that the larger the escalation is, the larger the domestic audience cost upon the leader will be [Fearon 1994]. This might explain why in 2016, Erdogan opted for military involvement in Syria and moved away from small-scale border skirmishes and support for anti-Assad elements. Eventually he realized that structural constraints needed to be obeyed, and hence we can see a Turkey-Russia-Iran axis forming by 2016. It can be argued that due to domestic pressure, Erdogan needed to "fix" his Syrian blunder through tighter cooperation with Russia. Nevertheless, this also has its potential downsides. Mankoff claims that by doing this, Erdogan gave Russia the upper hand in all areas which were subsumed under their strategic partnership during the first decade of 21st century [Mankoff 2016]. Thus, in fixing one problem, Erdogan created a plethora of others, but only time will tell how the electorate will react and whether or not will it punish him.

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